



CALVERT

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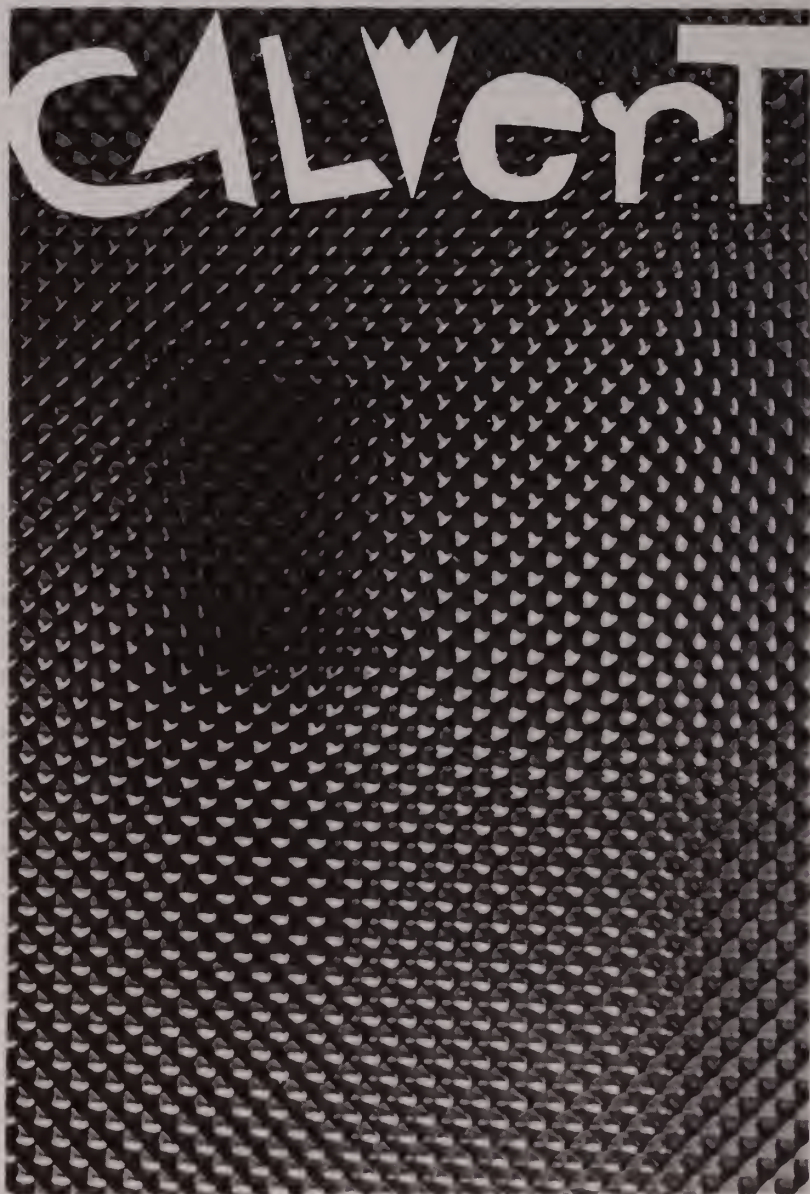
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CALVERT



Black on White

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Untitled

—*J. Barry Messer*

Angelic Orders

She strayed in the hall
untethered from her room

loose in the air, available
to any name I might call.

Wingless in her picked-at
sweater, grandmother sat with me

and nodded and held her hands
with her hands, listening

to something I couldn't hear.
And so intent, she stood as if

commanded and clapped her hands
and then sat down, and then stood up

until her minions in their
white hats came, not angry,

but to lead their angel
out of the confusing light

that broke in her hands.

—*Michael Collier*

letter to kirk

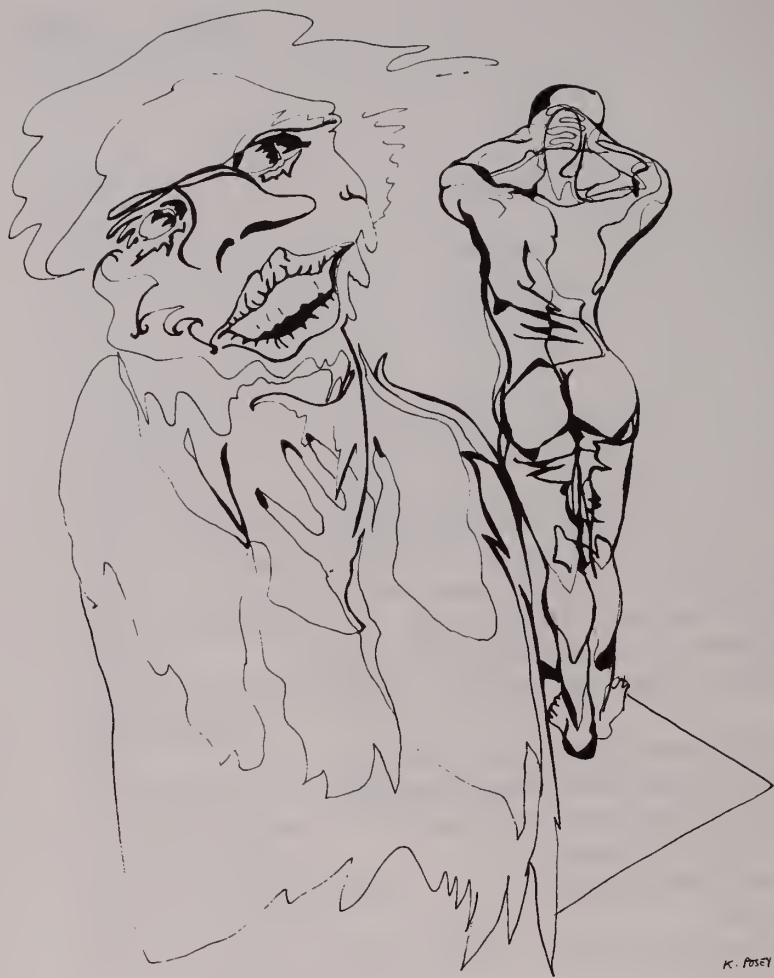
dear kirk,

who i have not seen in so long,
when was the last time we rode bikes?
forty on the back road
down to your yard
and over the bumps;
you jumped head first
over the handlebars when the brakes went out.
we laughed
and went into the woods
on the mountain behind your house.
up in the quarry
when the rocks went,
and your feet kicked
nothing,
i grabbed you by the hand—
the men yelled,
“hey!”
we laughed back and left.
it was our summer,
your parents’ land,
and no one could find us;
the others behind us,
left trailing the wrong path, while
we watched from the vines.

i remember the top path
under the power lines
where the steel giant chased us,
a million volts in each hand.
that is where we found the black raspberries.
we took enough for that night
when we camped on the island.
it was august and the moon was high;
we sat out late, poking the wet ground,
looking for earthworms;
we fished and talked about our first girls.
we thought of all the people who had drowned
in the potomac — and the moon was low then,
dipping in the west. it rested there
longer than we wanted, casting our shadows
further and further up the shore.

next day it was dusty on the back road,
walking to tastee-freeze. we saw people
on their porches. they didn't wave.
tastee-freeze was closed.
we barely made it back:
stone-tired
staggering down the road—

—*Richard M. Connor*



K. POSEY

—Kelly Posey

Untitled

Springs

My teeth are human teeth. They haven't the relentless demand of the she-wolf smile. But I am furred where it matters, between and behind the eyes. My vision spreads unconstricted, there is no white in my gaze. I am full of winter's lean, precarious health. My haunches are firm, the long muscles slide bloodheat along the inner lining of skin.

This land is winter, I live by its hungers, the soft, gut demands which shift air into thunder, here where air otherwise moves at a glacial pace. The word *cold* is a foreign word, smuggled in, an alien accusation spat off an alien tongue.

This is my land.

It is mine because I can stand between two sapling pine in full light and slip my shadow into theirs. It is mine because I can carry its nights whole and unwithered under bruising noon blue and carry its days to delicate flower under the thinnest lunar breath. I can hate and love here to make the fir trees whine in their sleep but leave no trace of my ecstasies on the snow. My veins are the land's rivers, its hot healing springs that never ice. There is no white in my eyes.

Why are you here?

Shrouded in layers and layers of other's dead skins, you cramp and force your heat to make your skin rain its oil and salted water, to make tropic where tropic cannot survive. There is nothing here to use such rain, yet you dare so rain, fill your pores with your body's waters that will only harden, become rancid and cake, swell and rupture you cell by cell.

You pant so ineffectively, you plod and stumble, goring the soft winter coat of the land down to its tender, red earth, down through the patient and peaceful aeons of sacrificial and nutrient leaves, even this you violate in your careless struggles. I hear you whisper "cold, so cold" as if to name this land, you only name yourself! the indifference of your passions, the passion of your violence. The snow holds no hate of you. It is only inquisitive, wants to know you, to

play. But all you feel is "cold, so cold." You kick and batter back, you sweat and stink, the snow pleads for your ear, clumps and clutches about your legs. But you don't hear, will never hear above your own wheezy clamour.

You are such a dischord here, you melt and muddy the crystal silence and the soft sparkle of snow. I shiver as you scream "Cold, so cold!" I watch the air sour around you, my nose wrinkles at the smell. You spew your heat out through all those dead hides you wear, through your own dying skin, craving to melt winter down and burn some other thing in. You incinerate your blood to cinders fighting this land until, at last, you, and only you, are cold, so cold. Too immobile to keep even a desert alive.

Winter rests shimmering around you, still wide and long as the time kept by earth. There is little left of you but a sick shiver in the air, a shrinking thing standing in the snow with something cold and hard and dusty in its veins that was once blood. This land can be patient for the rest of you. It has no mercy for you, will have all of you, with or without your life. You must be your own mercy.

Or I must be.

I watch you, I watch you, I hate you, I love you. I remember when I was new here, newer than the first naive leaf, out before the last frost. I came with nothing left to burn, a last gasp of heat, enough only to bend my knees and lay down in the snow, call it by my silence to play over me. I curled as if to unbud, go back into the branch. I whispered "please" and "yes." I iced over and sparkled beautifully in the sun, the last lick of my fire suspended back from ash.

I did not burn against the land but gave myself over, and my last ember was caught back in the blood to keep it blood, taught to flame again, cell by cell, taught to breathe *home* in the arteries. Taught by the time and peace to learn. I roused out of snow, heat slipping along the underside of my skin like the tongue cleaning the newborn pup. I roused out of snow a rambunctious young bitch, musking heavy as smoke of wolf and evergreen. I came with no weapon in me, no battering feet, no fear or rage. I came with a dead name and rose up out of snow with the ice melted from my eyes and this land as my new name.

Would you rise as well?

Would you be as I am, trusting winter with your fire, the last coal? Could you learn to take comfort from a seat, a bed of snow? Could you renounce sweat, the cowardice of leather? Could you stand the constant, tonic hunger of this place?

Could you love the living play of squirrels even as you lick that life, warm and salty from your lips? Could you chew the packed snow from between your fingers and toes? Could you change the shape of your tongue to pant and howl, yet keep the human speech? Could you forbid the word *cold*?

You don't see me among the trees.

You don't see my longleg lope, my skin the shade of bark and bare but what fur any human can claim. I am not what you'd expect. If you saw me you'd think me lost as you or farther gone, you'd think me mad and frost bit running naked among trees in the snow. You'd think me your own ghost but you don't see me. You don't see until I am sudden hot breath in your face, arrogant bloom springing through the snow. You merely stand and shiver, your eyes rolled white and blind in your face. You whisper over and over "ah...the ice." This is not a welcome, you still welcome nothing here. But I will have you welcomed. And warm.

My teeth are human teeth.

But the canines have wolf at the roots. There is a bit of wolf kiss in my lips. I am intimate with the texture of jugular skin. I erupt before you my mouth gleaming, you chanting "ah...the ice." But this is fire here. My hands on your shoulders thaw where they touch. Underneath the leather your muscle creaks, stiff and dull, but this will change. I nuzzle you face, lick your eyes, they roll down and close. I kiss you, taste the dry dusty taste of your tongue. I suck *cold* from it till *cold* dissolves away in steam. My mouth moves to your throat, nestles in the fold of jaw below the left ear. The skin is slick, tough, taste of sweat and leather. My teeth pierce it though, quick and painless, precise and easy to heal. There will be no scar.

The press and pull of my mouth makes no more than a thin plum flush on your neck, on the skin where it softens with the stirring of frozen ash back into blood. I can taste the change of ash back to blood, of cold to heat. I can taste

the hunger begin inside you, the hunger of this land. The desire of fire for itself. I suck at the vein until ash moves, remembers how to be blood, to move as blood, to fire and spring.

You sigh a low half-growl. Under my hands your shoulders shift, the muscle fluid as under a full-furred skin. Around us the trees moan, they dream rivers and green. I pull my mouth away and look into your face. Your skin is dry and soft. Your breath is warm. When I kiss you, you kiss me back. I lick your eyes and you open them.

The small wounds on your throat have already begun to heal. One rose drop wells up there and does not freeze.

—*Shelly L. Hall*



Spring

—Mira Hnatyshyn

Street Children

We always spit in the city,
gum stretches
and closes our mouths.
Our teeth glare in the night.
Lights catch our faces
and flames rise in our breath
while we draw black heat
from invisible fire.
Lipstick shines and forces us
to kiss the night
to walk under beams
til the spotlight hits

sudden and hard
we race with the spotlight,
listen to the green wail,
that steers us into the sides of buildings.
We feel hands trail over us
Pull us up— to rejoice,
to feel the swell of our flesh.

They cannot crawl deep with us
give us only sweet cherries,
then blow us swirling into bright red cars
and take us away
to let our hearts feed them.
So we breathe in deep and spin away

into the streets
dancing wild and blue.

—Lori Hopkins



Glendale Inversion

—*Stephen Young*

Boots

I.

I rise early. It's cold. I
slip my feet into the boots
of a man killed in battle.
Takes two pair of heavy wool socks
so I can walk without falling.

One lace breaks. I
knot the ends together.

II.

We breakfast. The others
in the house and I.
I have the boots
so today I can pour the coffee.

Everyone is silent.
Even the cock doesn't sound.
His head flops over the tin bowl
Carmencita Maria uses to catch the blood.
We'll eat him for dinner.

III.

The women all wear their best black.
I may wear the grandmother's shawl
from the drawer. My first black dress
hangs on the doorknob.

My mother braids my hair. Her hands
jerk my head. I do not cry.
She looks older than thirty years
as I look older than ten.

IV.

Soon we will light candles.
More beauty does not exist. Holy,
the beeswax drips, smells
of death.

Human voices howl
like nightbirds. The women
cry prayers for my father. I
wear his boots.

—*Kiki Theodoropoulos*



Untitled

—Zorica Lakic

Where I'm Going

It's been over an hour and I'm still waiting for Junior to get here from the hardware store. I should take advantage of the time and sleep in the truck—God knows I need it—but I can't. This neighborhood is too quiet for all the people that I know are around me, all of them inside. We've been working here three days and, though it's early Sunday morning, it must always be like this. The houses here aren't mansions, but they are new and expensive and well-built. I can hear the roar of Junior's truck, coming up the road, still far away. I sit up in the seat and light a cigarette. I feel like a burglar, here without him. Junior calls this place "high-dollar Potomac."

I watch his truck turn into the neighborhood and start up the hill, screaming in second gear, too loud for this place. Junior's truck is loud because it has headers and smoke stack exhaust pipes that stick up on either side of the cab—the kind you see on tractor-trailers. They are ridiculous and Junior doesn't like them, but they came with the truck, and the truck was a good deal. He traded another truck that had a blown engine and a wood stove to get this one.

He pulls up the driveway and stops, the caps on the tops of the pipes clanking. He kills the engine and gets out, a cup of coffee in his hand. He looks at me, his mouth open in his beard. I sit in my truck, one foot propped in the open hinge of the door, and stare back. He looks up behind me, wrinkle-eyed. He is looking at the tree, a dead red oak that stands in the narrow space between two houses. Thinking, no doubt, about the tree, he stands skinny and hunched like a buzzard; his head cocked up, eyes tiny, his long hair trailing out from under his cap.

I have been working for Junior for nine months. Along with another guy, Billy Orndorff, I am one of Junior's "itinerants." That's one of his more endearing terms for us and it's not far off the mark. Billy and I hardly ever work together. When one of us makes enough money or gets tired of working, the other one is about ready to start showing up again. Junior has been pleased with our timing. Lately, though, Billy has not shown up. Nobody knows where he is or what he's doing. And since I have moved out to Junior's place, I'm always there. He works seven days a week and I have missed only one day in the past month.

Junior looks at me. He shakes his head slowly.

"I know what you mean," I say.

He says, "well," and goes to the back of his truck and drops the tail gate.

For the past three days, we have been building a fence for the man who lives here, a young lawyer. The fence is for the family's new dog, a strange, fluffy

white creature. Yesterday, the lawyer came outside and wanted to talk about the tree.

"I don't know whose property it's on, but I certainly don't want it to fall this way." As he talked, his eyes switched from Junior's face to mine to the tree and back.

"By golly, I think I'll let you cut her down. Yep, might as well— You're here, right?" he said grinning, smacking his open hand into the other palm after Junior told him it would cost six hundred dollars. The lawyer looked at me. "Hot enough for you today? I just don't know how you guys do it day after day in this weather." He grinned and shook his head. The lawyer was the kind of guy who could talk to anyone. He could look at your face and tell you what you wanted to hear. Lawyers remind me of actors and actors are chameleons. I don't trust them.

I get out of my truck and haul the climbing ropes and harness around the corner of the garage to where the tree is. I stand there out of sight of Junior and light a cigarette. There is nothing for me to do until Junior finishes sharpening the chainsaws. He likes to do that by himself.

I stand near the tree and blow smoke, watching the little clouds I'm making drift in the still air. The house next to the lawyer's is close to the tree. It is high on this side, the basement at ground level. The sliding glass doors are mirrors in the dim light. From where I am standing, I can see the tree reflected in the doors. It is a dark blurred shaft against the faint sky. I push the corners of my eyes with my fingers and the tree's image, and the doors that frame it, doubles, triples, slants off at funny angles.

Yesterday afternoon, when I was nailing the top rail to the lawyer's fancy fence, I looked up towards the other house and the girl who lives there was standing inside the open glass doors. I'd say she's about sixteen years old. She was just standing there, facing out, wearing a long sleeved t-shirt and bright blue underwear, her legs dark and diffuse. I set a nail and hammered it in. When I looked up again, she was taking off her shirt. She pulled it off in one quick motion, her stomach growing long and taut, then relaxing; her breasts shaking in her bra. I stepped over three feet and held another nail and set it. I looked up and she was naked inside the doors, three pools of white shining out from the deep room. I watched her hands come into the light, each one grabbing a breast, holding them up tightly. I turned to the nail and hit it and bent it, the goddamned cheap finish nail.

I set the hammer down on the fence and stared at her. She had moved to the edge of the door, her body definite in the afternoon sun. Though she faced me, I couldn't be sure if she was looking at me or not. Abruptly, she sank back into the room and a few minutes later driving rock music blared from inside.

A dog is barking somewhere up the street. I can hear Junior banging around

his truck. There is a row of casement windows to the left of the glass doors, one of which is slanted open. I can see myself in one of them. I am a dark hat, a white shirt. There is smoke around my head. I smile and can see a faint shine of teeth. The girl must sleep in the room behind those windows. I would like to see her sleeping.

Junior comes around the side of the house carrying his climbing spikes. I pass him and go to the back of his truck and fill the saws with gas and oil. I like this job. It is something I can do and I know what to do without being told. I used to go to college, but I quit after four semesters. I had a queer notion that college would teach me how to live, or, if not that, would show me at least one solid thing.

When I come back with the saws, Junior is standing up next to the girl's house, his spikes strapped to his legs. I set the saws down and crane my neck towards the naked tree top, the bark-flecked branches white in the sunlight.

"Well?" I say.

"Well, well, well," he says, tugging on his beard. He turns and looks at me.

"See that one up there," he says, pointing to a gaunt limb that hangs high over the girl's house. "That one's gonna be a bitch. That's going to be our problem, Johnson. We'll sling that one and you let her down *real* easy. Keep her away from the house."

I nod, looking back up at the sundrenched limbs.

"OK daddy, I'm goin' up."

He ropes himself to the tree and starts up the dark bark, taking one short, slow step after another. Every six or seven feet, he stops to saw a small branch. I watch them fall. These little branches low on the main trunk are the only things left on the tree that have leaves.

The air conditioning unit attached to the lawyer's house starts up. A few minutes later, the one connected to the other house also comes on. It's August and it's been hot and humid, but it's not now at eight o'clock in the morning. These people here lead strange, shut-in lives. I'm beginning to believe that money makes you more isolated. But that little beauty likes *her* window open, likes to hear the crickets at night.

Junior is already higher than the roof of the girl's house. He yells down to me but I can't hear him over the humming air conditioners. I'm not sure if he wants the pole saw or the little chainsaw. This is going to be a problem. I am half-deaf from an adolescence of rock music and, of late, days upon days of whining chainsaw engines.

"I can't hear you!" I shade my eyes with my hat and look up at him. He calls down again but I still can't hear him. I hold my arms up in the air.

"Send up the goddamned pole saw goddamnit!"

"All right, all right!" Then I shout: "You don't have to get an attitude about

it!" He is shaking his head at me, looking down. I tie the pole saw to one of his ropes and he jerks it up.

Working in Potomac is a nice change. It's sort of an odd vacation for me, especially today, since, by being the ground man, I get to stand around a good deal of the time. We've been on a big job, clearing seventy acres of woods that, in a year or so, will be the site of a small housing development. It's hard work but I like the woods, even in the summer when they are choked with brush and insects.

I send Junior up the little saw. Even down here, the sound of the saw is loud. I hope it wakes everybody up. The first big limb comes down easily. When it smacks the grass, it breaks into pieces.

The girl's mother is sitting on the deck that juts high off the back of their house. She wears a robe and smokes. She doesn't look at me, her head is turned up towards Junior. Her gaze is steady, the hollows of her cheeks severely drawn.

I rev up the big saw and cut fallen limb into fireplace lengths. Little bugs come out of the cuts I make. The top branches are pretty rotten, but they'll do. We are going to haul all the wood away. This tree will make better than two cords, split and stacked. That's over \$220 worth of wood. Junior says he likes the firewood business because it is one of the few products people will buy that is one-third air.

I don't mind working with wood. Though I used to be a die-hard environmentalist, I realize that the trees I help take down, the solitary ones in back yards or the whole tracts of timber, are doomed. If I wasn't here, Billy or somebody else would be. Same goes with Junior. What I care doesn't matter. Junior says that in a few years there won't be a tree big enough to piss on out where we live. He's exaggerating, but the thought bothers me just the same.

I used to be a landscaper in the two years before I finally went to college and in summers and vacations during school. I have planted hundreds of trees in yards, shopping malls, government complexes. It makes me feel good that many of them will be around— will, in fact, just be approaching middle age— when I am long gone. Another month or two with Junior and my balance of trees planted to trees cut down will be in the red.

Junior is sixty feet high. The tree sways slightly where he is but doesn't move at all at the bottom. The sun is in my eyes everywhere I stand except up next to either house. It's grown hot and I take off my shirt and tie it around my head.

A shiny, wedge shaped car pulls in the driveway. A tall young man climbs out and glides up the front steps to the door. He has been here every day I have. I assume he is the girl's boyfriend but I have never seen them touch.

I'm still standing in the shade of her house when they come out. They go and sit on the grass and do stretching exercises. Both wear bright, silky shorts, t-

shirts, and running shoes. Both are deeply, evenly tanned and have sun-blond hair. The young man fascinates me. He has standard good looks. His body is carefully toned and his muscles do not bulge excessively. But it's his face— his look— most of all. His face is smooth and serene and seems to take in every detail of his surroundings with the same measured expression. Neither one looks my way the whole time they are in the yard. They finish stretching and move down the street, beginning to jog. I have watched them do this for three days now.

Junior is taking a long time negotiating around the limbs that branch out into the rotten top. I'm bored; I'm not used to standing around like this. I pick up sticks and pieces of bark and make a pile. I look up at Junior hanging close to the tree trunk. Trees are such solitary things and they live a long time. I go up and lean on the trunk. The hard bark is grooved and intricate as a relief map and I have never noticed before the small, pale green lichens that cling in the lines and furrows.

I see the girl's father leaning over the rail of the deck, watching me. He holds his pipe in his mouth with one hand, smoke curling out of his mouth and around his face and hair. He motions to me with the pipe and I wave back. Yesterday, as we were finishing up the fence, I would catch him watching us. He would come out on the deck and look over at us, puffing on his pipe. Sometimes, I would look up from what I was doing and see his shirt-sleeved back going into the house, a few strands of smoke slowly dissolving above where he had stood on the deck.

We go to a delly in Potomac for lunch. On the way back, Junior stops at a store and buys a six-pack of Near beer. Since Junior is an alcoholic, he drinks Near beer, birch beer, root beer, anything but *real* beer.

"Who was that woman waiting for you last night?" Junior asks me on the ride back to the job.

"That was *her*. Sandy. My ex. I guess you've never seen her before, have you?"

"No, I don't suppose I have," he says, keeping his eyes on the road.

"She's got a lot of nerve, let me tell you. I don't ever bother her at all but she's got to come out there and bug me and say 'Oh Jack, how can you live like this blah blah blah — your friends have been coming by asking about you blah blah blah — we can still be friends, right? blah blah blah.' I told her to get lost."

Junior snorts through his nose. He says: "Yeah, it's a funny thing. Take me and Sarah. We never got along before we were married. We must have split up twenty times. We had some fights, boy, we *had* some *real* fights. It's funny, now we get along better than we ever have."

"Yeah. Tell me about it," I say.

We were married for a year and a half. Things changed. She started saying

that she wanted "to live"; that I didn't have any "imagination." She was a theater major in college and acted in a lot of small productions out here and downtown. Then she got a stand-in part in a movie being filmed in D.C. She didn't get to say anything, all she had to do was walk down the street in the background. But that did it. All of a sudden, she had to be famous, like being famous was the most important thing to be. She ran off to California with a carpenter who fancied himself a rock-n-roll singer. She met him at the health food store where she worked. In two months, they were back and now they live together in our old place. She came out last night to tell me that she'd just gotten an abortion and was depressed. I can't see much imagination in any of that.

For the last two months, I have been living out in the country, in Sunshine, on Junior's place — a defunct chicken farm. My home is a 1957 International Harvester school bus that has no engine or seats. Someone had lived in it before and I have made further improvements. It's not roomy but it has a good roof. I have discovered that women do not like the outhouse or the lack of running water and that is too bad. The bus is parked just inside the woods at the far end of Junior's place. I drink spring water. Down the hill through the woods is the creek where I bathe. I love the peace and quiet out there.

The best thing, though, is its economy. Junior doesn't charge me rent and for the first time in my life I have managed to save some money. I have a small garden and two leghorn hens. Soon I will have a hog. My wife took our dog, but Junior has five dogs, and they spend a lot of time hanging around with me, out back by the bus.

As we pull back in the lawyer's driveway, I think about the little blonde, naked in the doorway. I wonder what she was doing. Could she have been just joyous about her own urgings, about her own body feeling heat in the sunlight or was she just posing? Was she trying to show me something or did I not even exist out there in the yard? It is impossible to say.

Junior climbs back up the tree. The girl's mother has moved from her place on the deck to a lawn chair far in the back yard. She smokes, sips a cold drink, watching Junior. Her look scares me. I wonder if she is hoping that the tree will fall on her house. Her husband, inspired, I suppose, by us, is moving an old, unused woodpile from one end of the back yard to a little triangle of woods that blends the border of their property, the lawyer's, and the lot in back of them. I watch his bent form rolling the fat, rotten logs across the yard, in front of his wife.

Junior is ready to drop the limb that hangs over the little blonde's house. I hold a rope in each hand — one to lower it, my end of the rope wrapped around another large tree in case the branch runs too fast — the other to pull the limb away from the house. I always worry that the branches will be too heavy for me to handle and will go out of control, but so far that has never happened.

He finishes his cut and the branch leaps in the air, almost striking him in the face. I feel its weight and panic, letting go of the steadying rope. The long bony limb stops in mid-air and swings about wildly, scraping across a first floor window. I pick up the other rope and pull it in, letting down on the drop rope until the branch rests on the ground.

A little paint was scraped off the window frame, but the window and the goddamned air conditioner under it are safe. Junior is yelling down at me but, since I can't hear him anyway, I don't bother to look up. Instead, I look over at the woman who sits, then at her husband. He is standing in the middle of the back yard, his face red and sweaty, a dark log in front of him.

Their Lab comes trotting around the corner of the house. It sees me and stops, its black tail high and motionless. Then, it catches sight of the lawyer's little white puppy inside the fence. The Lab runs over to the fence, its tail working furiously. The lawyer's dog wants to play, runs back and forth next to the fence. The Lab follows on the other side like a bigger shadow, sticking his nose frantically through the vertical bars of the fence, trying to catch a smell.

I start up the saw and begin to cut the limb. I look up and the little blonde is standing a few feet away, on the concrete slab in front of the sliding doors, watching me. She is leaning forward slightly, a quizzical look on her face. She smiles. I rev the chainsaw and lean down to make another cut.

I've heard of this kind of thing happening. Women, though usually older, usually married, bored and at home all day, inviting a working man inside for some coffee or a drink. There are many reasons: they don't have a man — they are widowed or divorced or their husbands are wimps and they need a man, any man, real bad. Or, they're the kind that just can't get enough, the kind for which no man is enough, that need ten men. You just can't ever tell. There's no way in the world to know what they want when they smile at you that way. I don't know whether to drop the saw and take her inside or walk over there and cut her in two, the little bitch. I refuse to look at her.

The two remaining limbs come down easily, but it all takes time. It is four o'clock by the time we are ready to take down the trunk. Junior and I stand and look at the dead oak that is now just an odd-looking pole sticking up above the house. Originally, we had planned to take down the trunk in sections, but now Junior wants to let the whole thing fall across the people's back yard. He asks my advice.

"Sure, why not," I say. I find myself volunteering to go ask their permission.

I walk around to the steps that lead up to the deck. The people went inside after the last branch came down. The woman's chair and an empty glass still sit on the grass. The Lab is lying on the deck and when he sees me, gets up and growls.

"Nice boy," I say, holding out my hand. I wonder what his name might be. I

expect him to start yelling but he doesn't for once. I knock on the sliding glass doors. They are identical to the ones downstairs.

The woman comes to the door. She has long, tired blonde hair pulled back tightly from her face. She slides open the door a few inches.

"What is it?" she says quickly.

"Junior would like to know if it would be all right if we dropped the tree across your back yard. It'd save us a lot of time."

She just looks at me, her lips pressed together. She says: "Do you think I should ask my husband?"

"Ah, yes. You'd better ask him," I say, smiling. She closes the door and disappears. I look over my shoulder to make sure the Lab isn't sneaking up on me. He sits and watches me, his ears up, from the other side of the deck. I look through the glass doors. The kitchen is a dark, shiny room. I wonder what the family talks about at dinner.

Sweat is running down my chest and off of my nose. I feel self-conscious and take my shirt off my head and pull it over my body. I feel like a teenage boy who has just walked up to a girl's front door on the first date.

She comes back and slides the door open a few inches. "Sure, it's fine. Just be careful," she says, smiling at me.

Junior finds two sticks and squats on the ground, facing the tree. He holds the ends of the sticks together, one parallel to the ground, one perpendicular, making two sides of a triangle. He looks down the vertical stick, then up at the tree.

"What are you doing?" I say.

"Old trick my father-in-law taught me."

"Bull."

He ignores me. He steps forward a few feet and pushes one of the sticks into the ground. "It's gonna land right here."

"What?" I say. "For a tree man, you've got no idea how long a tree is." A few weeks ago, out in the woods, he let a tree fall right on his truck. I tried to tell him but he didn't listen. Lucky for him, it was a small one. All it did was break the tail gate off and dent the bed.

"That tree won't come near that stick," I say, feeling tired.

"*Man*, you just don't got any *faith*," he says, smiling at me. He looks at me the way Marshall Matt Dillon used to look at Festus; his eyes all wrinkled and small, breath hissing out his open mouth.

"We'll see. We will just see," he says, walking away.

By the time Junior is pounding the steel wedge in the back side of the tree, everyone is outside, waiting to see the tree fall. I stand back at the edge of the yard, into the leaves and brush of the small triangle of woods, holding the rope that connects me to the top of the tree. All these people make me nervous and I won't look at them. Instead, I concentrate on the tree. Junior told the lawyer

that the tree probably died because its roots were disturbed when the land was regraded for development. Sometimes, it takes a couple of years for them to die after that, he said.

Junior stands up straight and looks my way. His look says he is going to finish the cut through to the wedge cut on the side of the tree that I face. I wipe my hands one at a time on my pants and grip the rope and lean back. I look over and see that the little blonde and her boyfriend are sitting under the deck to get a better view. Her younger sister is up on the deck with the Lab. Junior starts up his saw.

"Hey," I yell over to the parents, who are standing apart on the grass. "Tell them to get out from under there! Her too!" The father goes over and shoos them out. The lawyer, his fat wife, their three small children, and their puppy are all in the far back corner of their yard. This family has gathered in the opposite corner of their own yard, near me. Everyone is still, finally. I look over at them and they seem like a weird arrangement of bushes.

When I lean back on the rope, brush and branches scrape my bare skin. It comes to me that this little patch of woods behind me, no bigger than two school buses parked side by side, is all that is left of what was once a big tract of woods. Where once it was solid forest, with racoons and deer and birds all through, now has big chunks cut in it; a few trees are left behind, solitary and in small groups, the land dominated by these different shaped dwellings. Separated from the woods behind me, by walks, grass, windows and brick walls, each house has people in them, all together. I can imagine them sitting around the fireplace or television set in winter, this little woods out back, cold, barren, even of birds. I lean back on the taut rope, the top of the tree bending slightly towards me. Where the hell am I going to live in twenty years when everything is cut down and built up?

I hear a crack and then Junior's saw bogs down. The tree rocks slowly. Junior steps away from the tree, looking towards me. I pull hard, stepping back into the brush, the rope slowly going slack in my hands. I turn and push the brush out of my way, as I run away from the falling tree. It shakes the ground with its impact.

I come back onto the grass. Junior is walking towards me, grinning. Since he doesn't drink or do drugs anymore, this is how he gets his kicks. I see that the tree didn't come anywhere close to the stick in the ground but fell perfectly in line with it.

"Man, I knew that thing wouldn't come near here," I say to him as he comes up to me.

He laughs. "Well then, why'd you jump?"

"I didn't jump."

"The hell you didn't," he says, grinning.

"Jesus," I say. The tree looks heavy on the ground, massive and unmoveable in its bulk, like a beached whale or a dead bear. I walk down alongside it to the stump, to get the saw. It's getting late and I'd like to get a good bit of it sawed before quitting. I bend over to pick up the saw and the wet smell of the heart wood of the oak fills my nose. It's the sweetest smell. Smells like a live barn or like a field that has just been plowed after laying fallow for years. I check the gas and oil in the saw. The children are running around. Two of the lawyer's kids are on the tree trunk, dancing and shrieking. The blonde and her boyfriend are holding hands, walking towards the tree. They are *some* couple. They smile shyly at me and I wave to them. The lawyer and his wife are on the other people's yard and the two couples stand, each arm in arm, talking to Junior.

I put the saw down and sit on the stump. The sawdust is wet and sticks to my pants. I sit and smile at the stupid Lab who runs back and forth in front of the fence, the little white puppy on the other side barking.

I drink in that red oak smell, that smells so good. I watch Junior and the two couples talking, all of them standing near the little groves of oaks and poplars. I want to go over where they are. I want to talk with those people like Junior's doing.

—*Glenn Moomau*



Untitled

—Patrica Willets



Untitled

—*J. Barry Messer*

Prism

At first, she burned candles
in the dark, dripping the wax onto her palm
so she could peel away the lines. She drew
pictures of hands on the wall
and painted them to pray— to pull her up
through her pores, transparent and
out of her body.

the sound of ice splintering
followed her; it was the lye
she drank that revealed the fracture.

The string that held her beads had dissolved,
spilling and breaking them into fragments
restrung later as the letters of her name
on a green hospital bracelet.

one by one, her ghosts were plucked
with a needle, the holes were sealed
by quick electric burn
leaving her still. My sister
in silent white as an angel
(and why not me), but

madness aspires to slow motion,
its colors hover as legless butterflies
searching for a soft space to land.

—Anne Benaroya

Midwest Summer

After the storm

the stone bridge walks again
crossing the shallow river
quietly

like a night light

Beside his bed
a large glass jar
filled with captured stars
holes punched in the white top
to let them breathe

—*Vinton Valentine*



Untitled

—Mira Hnatyshyn

Vikings

These fingers multiply the keys.
Sometimes I think they ought to reach
Into an airplane propeller.
Incisive as they fancy themselves
To be, they are not so unremittingly
Wholesome.

They are not loaves rising
And falling under some moonlight.
Assuaging themselves with words
Comes only by way of consolation
In their loveless world.
They are hardly wholesome.

These fingers are like frogs,
These typewriter keys lilypads.
And their island to island leaps
Occur with such startling
Alacrity I cannot help but infer
Fate circling underneath.

Once, in a science film I saw
A kind of lone fish that navigated
Waters so dark and tossed they were
Italic; it had a lantern
Suspended over its head bright
As a glowworm luring prey.

I cannot tell you where metaphor ends
Or begins; only that these fingers
All have wills their own.
They are vikings.
Even the winds by which they sail
Are hassling this paper.

—Tomás Martin



Untitled

—*Eric Nicholson*



Man and His Instruments

—*Patrica Willets*

Boxes

I hated it when the boxes came. It was usually the same time Mama was taking her nap. It wouldn't have been so bad if the doorbell had went, "Ding-dong;" but it didn't. It was the kind you turn like a wind-up toy, and it went, "Rinnnng."

It almost always woke Mama up, and that was not good. She needed to rest. She played all the time like she just took naps because there wasn't nothing else to do, but there was plenty to do.

She was sick behind her eyes. I could see it laying in there whenever she looked at me.

The boxes came for about a year. From right after Henry Earl left. Henry Earl was mine and Hank's father. Hank even has his same name, but he is ashamed of it.

Me and Hank have called him Henry Earl to each other since he left. Since my brother is called Hank instead, it don't bother us too much to call him that. At least not as much as it would if I called him Daddy like I used to. Mama says he must have had a good reason for leaving us, but I have never believed it.

Henry Earl's mother sent the boxes. When they first started coming, Mama would exclaim over them and say how it was just like our grandmother to be so generous. But, after a while, she didn't say much of anything when they came.

The man who is like a mailman, but isn't, is the one who would bring them and ring the bell. If I saw his brown truck when I was outside playing, I wouldn't go in for a long time. Gable Street was old and skinny, with a lot of houses scrunched up together, and it was easy to disappear there.

The boxes was wrapped up in brown grocery sacks. They had scratchy string wound around and around them. When you got all that stuff off, there was the cardboard box with brown tape wrapped around and around that. You had to open it with a knife. You had to be real careful not to cut all the things inside because it was always filled plumb full. When you did get it open, there was everything inside all wrapped up separate in newspaper.

On top was a metal fruitcake box wrapped up in newspaper. The lid said, "Please Save This Box." And Mama would. There was a whole collection of empty ones behind the couch. Sometimes we'd forget and plop down real hard on the couch by accident. The whole pile would come crashing down. What a racket! But that would be about the only time we would see Mama smile anymore.

Old Mrs. Hemming downstairs would come rushing up and pound on the door.

"What's going on up here now?" she'd holler when Mama answered the door.

Mama would wink slow at me and Hank and say, "Why, I dropped the stone out of my ring, Mrs. Hemming. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

Dried apple cake was what was in the fruitcake boxes before they wound up behind the couch. Mama called it stack cake, and she purely loved it. I never even wanted to taste it. There was no telling how old it was. Mama said it improved with age, but I just didn't know. Nothing old I ever saw was much good.

My dresses was always first after the stack cake. Most of the time the ones the grandmother sent was made to the same pattern. It didn't do me a lick of good to be particular about them. Mama didn't have any money to burn. Every time I complained, she would tell me, "You might not win any fashion contests, but you won't have to go naked either. You can wear that sweater over them."

The next layer in the box was stuff the grandmother had put up in Ball jars. Green beans and tomatoes, mostly. They didn't look like the store-canned ones. The grandmother's beans and tomatoes was both gray, and the tomatoes also looked like there was mud in the jar. They didn't taste too bad when Mama cooked them up, though.

The packages at the bottom of the box was usually Hank's. Most of the time it would be a pair of bought overalls and two or three shirts the grandmother had made.

The shirts was always short-sleeved, and the sleeves had been set in funny. There was a lot of puckering on their tops. When he had them on, a bunch of ruffledy material stood up about a inch on his shoulder. They was usually brown or dark green. The kids at school had got used to them and didn't laugh about them anymore, but he still hated them.

The overalls wasn't too bad. Just stiff. I always wondered where the grandmother had got them. Somehow, I couldn't imagine her ever leaving her house.

We had been there one time, in the summer. It was a pretty long ride on the Trailways bus. About six hours from Memphis. Mama had packed a sack lunch for the four of us. Along the way she pointed out soy beans and tobacco growing. Henry Earl tilted his seat and pulled his hat over his eyes. He slept the whole time.

When all the land started looking the same, Mama taught us and a boy from West Memphis, Arkansas, how to get points with the car licenses going by. That boy was going all the way to Richmond, Virginia. He knew a lot of jokes and riddles me and Hank didn't. *What has eyes, but never cries? A potato. How do you stop a rooster from crowing in the morning?* Eat it the night before.

Once Mama shook Henry Earl to see if he wanted to eat a bologna sandwich

with us, but he didn't. "If I wanted to eat, I'd eat. If I wanted to drink, I'd drink," he mumbled. "I'm a grown man with a mind of my own." Then he put his hat on his knees and turned his head against the window and went to sleep that way. Mama leaned across the aisle and whispered we should be quiet now because a lot of other people was tired too.

The town was called Cullup Ridge. The bus let us off outside a old grocery store with a porch. There wasn't no bus station. Henry Earl told us when he lived there, there had been a sign in the window of the store that said, "Niggers and dogs don't let the sun set on you in Cullup."

The house he was raised in was about a block from there, just behind the train depot. It was a little house, and the train tracks was practically the whole side yard.

The grandmother was standing on the front porch when we got there. She shook hands with Mama, but she didn't hug Henry Earl or nothing. She bent over a little and put one hand on my shoulder and one hand on Hank's shoulder and just looked at us real hard a minute. She smelled like Vick's Salve.

The first thing I ever heard the grandmother say was: "Henry Earl, my Social Security check ain't come this month."

Then she said, "Well, why'n't y'all come on in?"

We all went into the living room. It was dark in there because all the curtains was closed, and she didn't open them up.

Henry Earl sat next to Mama on the couch. The suitcase we brought was between his knees. Me and Hank sat on a big purple chair that had pointy material covering it that stuck into your bare skin. The grandmother sat in a all wood rocking chair.

There was a old tall piano there, too, and I was surprised to see lots of pictures of me and Hank sitting on its top. Nobody else. Just me and him.

The grandmother asked Henry Earl if he was working yet.

He said he had been at the hosiery mill for a year, but he was laid off now for the summer.

Mama said she was taking in ironing and that with the unemployment check, we was doing all right for the time being. She smoothed down the front of her sundress like she did when she was mad and didn't want to show it.

Then she said, "I got Henry Earl to go to church, too, Etta, just like you always said I ought."

Me and Hank just stared at each other. Nobody had ever told me. We knew about Henry Earl going to church. What we was surprised about was me having the same name as the grandmother.

"He's been saved, and he'll be baptized the second Sunday of next month. He hasn't touched a drop in weeks — even when he was laid off." Mama kind of threw her chin up in the air when she finished saying this. She wasn't much big-

ger than me, but she always looked bigger when she put her chin up like that.

The grandmother rocked back and forth a couple of times, and then she stood up. "I'll show you where to put your things."

Later, me and Hank walked up and down the road, and then we sat on a concrete slab outside the train depot a while.

I threw a little rock at a train that was going by but not stopping. I said, "I hate my name."

"She might be nice, Etta. We don't know her, that's all," Hank said.

"I don't want to, neither," I said. "She's old and creepy."

Hank laughed at me. In a minute, he said, "She does put me in mind of a old ghost in a haunted house."

We couldn't think of nothing else to say about her after that.

For supper, we had a big pot of gray green beans with hunks of gray ham floating in it. The ice-tea was black and had rainbows on the top like a rain puddle with gasoline drops in it. There was cornbread too, and that looked and tasted pretty good. It didn't matter; Me, Mama, Henry Earl and Hank all ate real fast and had seconds of everything no matter what. That sack lunch had said goodbye a long time ago.

Me and Hank did the dishes. I dried them and put them right back on the table we had eat on. There was so many skinny cupboards in the kitchen, I wouldn't have had no idea of where to look to put them away.

While we was doing this, Henry Earl was sitting out on the front porch step, smoking. He never had been a really big talker, but now Hank said since he'd quit drinking, he was going to be the quietest Primitive Fire Baptist in the world. The grandmother and Mama was in the grandmother's room which was just across from the kitchen. They was getting the stuff to fix the beds. I could hear the grandmother talking.

"I wouldn't take nothing for these two cedar chests Carter gave me the day we was married, and there ain't a electric machine today that can sew up a piece of material like this old treadle machine can. I've always been mighty grateful to Henry Earl for not selling them off that time he sold practically my whole house to buy himself a couple of bottles."

Then Mama carried some quilts from out of the cedar chests into the living room. She made up a bed on the pulled-down couch for her and Henry Earl with one of them. She used the rest to lay me and Hank a pallet on the kitchen floor. We was each on one side of the bathroom door.

It had been a real hot day, but the night was lots cooler, even with all the windows closed. Everybody went to bed at the same time there. I thought it was funny that even Mama and Henry Earl went to bed at mine and Hank's bedtime. It had just got dark good, but it was already so black I couldn't see nothing, not even Hank who was just about beside me on the floor.

I kept laying there with my eyes open, staring into the dark. I was thinking about Hank calling the grandmother a ghost. And I was thinking about my name. I was trying to figure out why nobody had ever told me it was the same as the grandmother. I can't exactly explain it, but I felt like a piece had been kind of chopped off inside me.

All of a sudden, there really was a ghost. It was walking right past me. It was so weird — it didn't make no noise at all on them wood floors that had been squeaking like crazy all day long whenever people walked on them. It had on a long white nightgown that swished against the side of my face. It was moving real slow into the bathroom. I didn't know whether to move or scream or anything.

Once at home, there had been this big alley cat get in behind the curtain where I slept. It crawled up on me and rubbed its soft fur up and down, up and down under my nightie. It felt real good, and I liked it. Then it felt like it was trying to crawl into my panties, and I did not like that, so I reached down to throw it off me. It turned into a man's hand. I was so scared. I screamed and screamed. Then I felt so silly. Henry Earl and then Mama was both there. Mama hugged and hugged me. I had been sound asleep, dreaming. Maybe I was now.

Next thing I knew, I heard this metal *thunking* from on the screen porch the other side of the bathroom. Then here comes the ghost past me again. Then I didn't hear nothing else. It was a long night.

I must've finally got to sleep because then Mama was shaking me to wake up. Her and the grandmother was dressed and was making biscuits and sausage gravy almost right over my head. I had got into the bathroom and had already peed and washed my face and hands before I remembered about the ghost. Both the bathroom doors was closed. I opened the one that went on to the back porch.

All that was there was a broom, a big sink, a wringer wash machine, and some clothes lines. I don't know why I went to look in it, and I don't know why there was a government check in the bottom of the wash machine, but there was. The check said Etta P. Rainer on it. I left it there. I put the lid back on and went and ate biscuits and gravy without never saying nothing about the ghost or the check to no one.

We only just spent that one night. After breakfast, the grandmother helped Mama fix us another sack lunch for the Trailways bus, and we went back home.

Henry Earl Rainer never has got baptized that I know of. He went out to get some Camel cigarettes one night soon after we got home, and he hasn't come back yet.

Mama was lots sicker than even I thought. She died in the Memorial Hospital last month, and me and Hank has been at this foster home since before that. But now there has been some kind of a court, and they told me and Hank we are going to live with our grandmother, Etta P. Rainer. She is old, they said, but she is not too old. The state will give her extra money for us on top of her Social Security. They say it is better for us to live with family if we can.

—*Dawnelle Loiselle*



Untitled

—Kelly Posey

Rage

His sleep slices open
her fire
the slivers hiss
beneath her quaking
eyes flicker caged
holes swollen burn
she sucks in the rage
his lies have taught her

Would that she had
the heart of Lizzie
she would cleave him
into many splinters
watch him bleed unexcited
as the montly flow
she would flush him
as a tampon discarded

Her fingers would nail
his eyeballs shut
he would never see her
stuffed into the wound
where he pushed her
where she cannot find
her hands

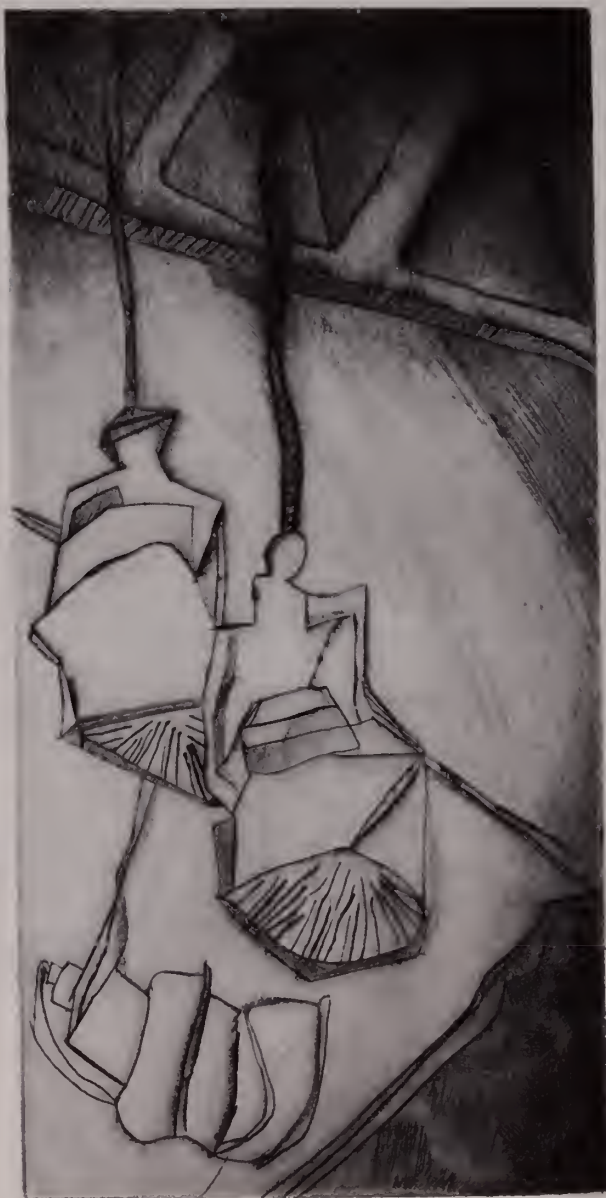
—*Valerie Russell*

Note to Marina Marquez of El Paso, Who Sublet my Apartment for the Summer

We miss each other by just an eyelash.
We never met, and yet this place
is still your home before it drifts back home
to being mine. The shelf that's empty
of scotch keeps the smoke of tequilla,
a Flamenco album sidles up to Mahler's Eighth.
I surprised the tortillas and hot chili peppers
you left in our freezer
as I put in a bag of potatoes.

I tiptoe when thinking the hairpin under the bed.
This morning in the shower, my third day back,
through steam I noticed again
the gleam of a single dark pubic hair.
Sometimes I listen hard. At night
in the vaguely foreign country of my bed
I lie very still. I breathe it deep.
I write you nowhere, afraid you will
startle away too soon if I dare to tell you
I miss you and wish you would stay

—Rod Jellema



Untitled

—Kelly Posey

a death in the family

twenty three birds line the wires
like notes on a staff raised from the ground
i try to
scare them away again
they return like disease along some line of nerve
dumping in lungs
cancer anemia
trying to hide

their pincers make calls
like crumpled tin foil rasping a screen
the birds are blue their eyes are black
wings around bellies make them bigger than they are
notes shrill mourning

is it a
song for a sparrow killed by a cat

i tried to play
bird songs on my guitar before i could
notes were confused chords wouldn't
i thought that the
staff might be strings i removed the lowest

i could write to
avoid bird confusion i want to
talk clearly hear soundly
messages are tied to
wire and poles for miles and miles

i will call through
tin foil fractures i listen for
breathe cough whisper or the
cries of a sparrow or the whispers of
feathers jammed in the panels of my porch

—Roger Hecht



The Frog

—Mira Hnatyshyn

Garden

Flowers
Almost the color of traffic lights
Wait at the corner
For men
That glance at a man, but dream of
Lemonade from
Five-cent stands
As they pause at the corner for
Traffic lights
While brave chrysanthymums
Clutch all thats left of the day
And steal
All thats left of the sun

—*Elizabeth Festa*

For Dolores Haze

"You know, what's so dreadful about dying
is that you are completely on your own"

Nabokov (*Lolita*)

The one ruby pane
in the dormer window,
hung above the stairs
like a sacrifice,

your voice is absent from the swarm
the frolic of the world.
you ride instead the phallus
like a Woolworth horse,
the rub of middle age between your thighs.

hunched on the rock of approaching life,
your barely grown shoulders know more of shrugging,
leaning bony over comics—
know more of t-shirts tossed in corners,
and gum back and forth across your teeth.

your girlish sweat has led him
to your doorway. he has pressed
his cold face to the pillow you rub
your nose on
and hug like a last fragment
of a bear.

Though you assumed your privacy,
he arrested you through the mirror's reflections—
the raised eyebrow
the mouth dropped open
the eyes themselves
two vials of fetid water
stirred by the stick of his lust.

What could the glass give back to you or him
but a distended stomach
enclosed at 17,
a pinned specimen framed under earth
clutching a stillborn girl
beneath the Christmas snow?

—*Betty Bernard*

Gramarye

The Irish kings kept satirists,
tall narrow men in woven green
with pale glass eyes. They
could raise blisters just
by speaking.

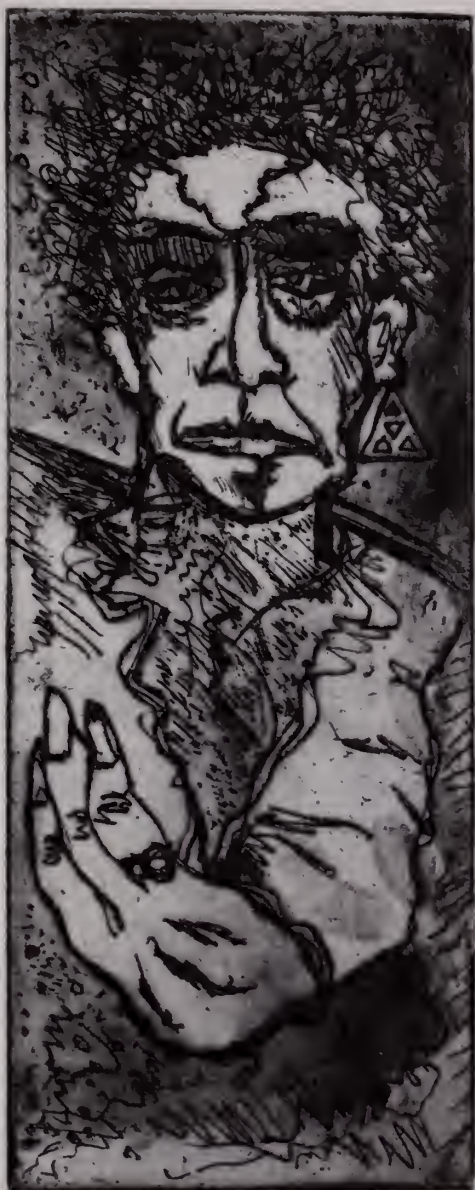
In war they were the shock troops
sent to hurl sharp words against
the charge of naked men equipped
with spears and sticks and stones.
To stop them dead with spelling.

Soft words will do the job
as well and wound like love,
smooth words and writhen, twisted
out of veil and velvet.

See which fits your strategy,
choose how you want to hurt.
Try out *whisper, lie, remember,*
moonlight, promise, last night,
child. Betray a name.

But be on guard. It will betray
you, twist and cut you open,
let out all those other words
you didn't mean to mean— the ones
you stockpiled for the war
you knew was coming.

—Verlyn Fleiger



Untitled

—Kelly Posey

Natural Selection

I hate him.

I hate everything about him. I hate the way he talks. I hate the way he walks. I hate the way he chews his food with his fucking mouth open, like a goddamn dog.

But most of all, I hate the way he laughs.

He doesn't laugh like most normal people. Most normal people will laugh at something that's funny. He laughs at everything. Most normal people sound reasonably human when they laugh. He sounds like some crazed hyena.

He is a crazed hyena.

Why in God's name did I marry this man?

I hate her.

I hate everything about her. I hate the way she beams. I hate the way she moves her hands through her hair constantly. I hate the way she turns her nose up at everything, like the snotty bitch she is.

But most of all, I hate the way she glares.

She glares at everything, especially me. And whenever she aims her holier-than-thou look my way, I swear it's all I can do to keep my hands from her fucking throat. She glares at me while I'm writing, she glares at me while I'm watching the tube, she glares at me while I'm washing the goddamn dishes, and I'm sure that, in the middle of the night, while I'm fast asleep, she's still glaring at me.

She is a glaring bitch.

Why in God's name did I marry this woman?

The bee collects pollen from the flowers, and in the process the flowers thrive, and the bee contributes materials to its hive for the production of honey.

The spider spins its web, and when the dew settles in the early light of the dawn, the web becomes a thing of beauty.

I used to love him.

Really I did. I loved his eyes; they were dark and deep and filled with wonder and excitement. I loved his smile; his white, even teeth were a beacon to me when I was lost in despair. I loved his hands; they were big and strong, but they were so very gentle and soothing to me. He was my rock, my anchor, my grip on reality.

But now, all he does is sit in front of his damn typewriter and write things I

cannot understand. He smokes like a fucking furnace. And he laughs. He's always laughing at the stupidest goddamn things. Who does he think he is, sitting there in his cloud of smoke, laughing? God?

I hate that man.

And to think, I used to love her.

Really I did. I loved her voice; she was a born singer, and when she spoke, you could hear the melody and the treble and the soaring resonance. I loved her style; she always walked like she was floating, she always said the right thing, and she never, but never made mistakes. I loved her legs; they were long, firm legs because she was a dancer, and when I had those legs around my waist, I was the happiest man alive.

But now, she's always brooding and petulant. She refuses to speak to me. She drinks like a fish, but when she's drunk, she gets even quieter. It's driving me fucking batty; what in God's name does she want from me? I've given her the best of everything, and she just isn't satisfied, the little slut.

I hate that woman.

But the bee is equipped with a tiny stinger on its rear end. It is supposed to protect the bee from its enemies, but there are people who have died from the sting of a bee, people who probably never meant the bee any harm. And once the bee has used its sting, it cannot continue to live.

And the spider's web, though a thing of beauty, is meant to capture other insects that the spider uses for food.

I'm going to kill him.

It's going to hurt him very much. He's going to bleed; I need to see his blood, dripping on the carpet. He's going to scream; it will be music to my ears. I've taken too much shit from that son of a bitch for him to take the quick and painless route on me.

Snakes.

I'm going to New York this weekend, but before I leave, I'll get some pythons and some boa constrictors and some rattlesnakes, and I'll put them in the mattress. He'll lie down that night, probably at two in the morning after sitting in front of the damn typewriter for hours writing his stupid shit, and he'll feel the mattress begin to writhe and squirm underneath him, and he'll scream so loud that all the souls in Hell will stop to wonder at the pain in his voice. And I'll be in New York, laughing my head off in a cloud of smoke.

He's going to die.

I'm going to kill her.

It's going to be the most painful death in the history of man. She's going to pull all her hair out and scream until she loses that beautiful fucking voice of

hers. She's going to pay for the years she's treated me like dogshit.

Hydrogen cyanide.

She's always putting on her disgusting peach rouge when she goes travelling. I'll just mix some HC in that rouge. And when she excuses herself from her seat on the plane and goes into the ladies' room, she'll have roughly fifteen minutes of excruciating, agonizing, burning facial pain to look forward to. The stewardess will probably offer her a glass of water. And I'll be in bed, running my hand through my hair, and sleeping like a baby.

She's going to die.

The bee finds itself trapped, suddenly, in the spider's web. As the spider closes in for the kill, the bee panics, and in its frenzy to remove itself from the tangled web, the bee stings the spider, and they die, inextricably entwined.

—James A. Wu



Untitled

—*Christian Ruch*

Hightide Bush and Waterweed

I bend and stand stoned
boat the bay of shellfish
fishing for rock

But the rock are scarce now
It is weakfish and spot
that flap and ice these baskets
Flounder and squid that squirm
with bloated toadfish in the trawl

I am stiff shot and cold
wear waist coat and hip flask
freezing as rock

And I am floating in the mouth
of a dead bodies gasp
And this mouth is cold
And the wetness of spit
And the oysters aren't oysters but spat

I reach in this mouth, this bay
that mouths, I reach
with ten-foot tongs
scraping the tongue of mud for oyster

But the oysters are scarce now
and it is spat
I am scraping with tongs for spat
Wet as a dead mouth's tongue

And the tongue is empty and mud
And the tongs too
And the touch is cold

I am probing the contours of tongue
searching for spat in the sludge

I dredge and stand stern
claw the bay bottom
rocking the boat

But I am scared now
this mouth will not speak
this near-ice sea
this chesapeake

And it has shifted and clammed down
And it has left

—*Tom White*

Timing

Last bottle tipped and puddled
out, we sit, our backs against
the light, our faces baffled
from line and edge. I am unwilling
to detail out the cracks
in brick, your hands as they
strike out at the words
you speak. Day sloughs off
into shreds of light
on panelled wood. Dear,
were this another time,
I would not dare to say
I know what you think,
but our friends will ask us,
how well we love, and what
to come? How can we tell
them, words worn smooth,
flushed out as so much marble
in the streets by rain, when
all we ask is to find our
coats, a safe drive home,
a fist of water?

The gravel drive beneath
our feet mocks crusted snow.
Listen, we've walked this path
so many times, I know where
the branch is that overhangs
the road, I must duck so
I don't hit it. So why
now, do we close in on
each other, tighten our
breath, and clip our feet
at the ground in such sharp
angles? We can tell them
how even the houses of
Faulkner's Ridge use the night
to pull themselves out from
the logic of light; know
how much it is just by luck
we live another day.

—*Laura Dickinson*

Contributors

• Richard M. Connor is a senior studying Philosophy, Mathematics and French • Verlyn Fleiger part-time person, full-time poet • Glenn Moomau is a senior English major • Michael Collier, a 1984 NEA fellowship recipient, is a Lecturer in English at the University of Maryland, College Park • Lori Hopkins is a junior Women's Studies major • Dawnelle Loiselle is an English major graduating in May • Tomas Martin is taking it one day at a time • Elizabeth Festa is a visiting student from Wesleyan in Connecticut • Valerie Russell is Roman spirit, womanist feeling, poet-talking soul • Betty Bernard is an English major and mother of three • Vinton Valentine "In nominae de. . . • Anne Benaroya cleans houses and lives in Langley Park • Kiki Theodoropoulos is co-ordinator of Writers Here and Now • Roger Hecht is a junior English major and an organizer with a messy desk • Rod Jellema is Head of the Creative Writing Department and author of *The Eighth Day* (Dryad) • James A. Wu is a sophomore majoring in Pre-Architecture and English • Kelly Posey is a Studio Arts major with an interest in painting • Shonna E. Jones is making her mark in advertising design • Mira Hnatyshyn is an Advertising Design major looking for freelance work • Patricia Willets used to be a Brownie. Now she goes to college. Thank you. • Zorica Lakic hangs out at Kramer Books • Stephen Young wants to go to Berkeley and play Hacky-Sack • Eric Nicholson is making his second appearance in Calvert • Christian Ruch is a native Swiss contemplating return to Europe

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